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ABSTRACT

An examination of the literature supports the view that the implications of text studies have yet to have much impact on classrooms. For example, word frequency lists have been used widely in the preparation of reading materials. However, few books come with a list of the frequency of the words they contain. Thus, the main use of comparing texts against the vocabulary of their readers has been in research. Studies of cohesion seem to be relevant to selection of materials--in guiding inspection rather than in producing an index of difficulty. Furthermore, they suggest features, of which children could be usefully aware, that are important for the comprehension of texts. Propositional analysis was intended as a research tool and its use remains mainly for research purposes. On the other hand, analysis of story grammars offers a means of relatively objective analysis and may be helpful for teachers in devising "complete the story" tasks. Rhetoric is also useful in that it provides an explicit knowledge of conventions used in discourse. Although various analyses suggest means of examining books for selection or of preparing tasks, exercises, or analyses for children to undertake, a shift in their emphasis from research to classroom application is required to make them useful. (HOD)

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# Practical applications of analyses and descriptions of texts.

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## Introduction

Analyses and orderly descriptions of text have attracted increasing attention among linguists and have formed a basis for a good deal of recent work in cognitive psychology, especially in those researches which have a bearing on the study of reading. However, the character of much of the work has been theoretical rather than practical. This is not to say it is not relevant to practical questions; merely that the theory-based research which Gibson and Levin (1975) advocated for reading has become more popular among reading researchers and has always been dominant in linguistics and psychology. Nevertheless, it may seem strange that recent work on text does not have an obvious relevance to such practical matters in education as book selection, devising tasks and exercises, having children analyse text, perhaps with a view to improving their writing as well as their reading, and so on. However, the relevance is considerably less obvious than that of readability formulae, which also provided a means of analysing (or more accurately categorising) texts. Readability formulae have been usefully reviewed and discussed by Harrison (1980) who emphasises classroom relevance, and they will not be examined here. What is at issue rather is whether recent work in text has practical relevance for teaching.

It is mainly <u>possible</u> relevance which we assess, for few studies have attempted to consider the use for teachers or children of carrying out their own analyses. Examination of those papers

given to the previous UKRA Conference which were concerned with text supports the view that the implications of studies of text have yet to have much impact on classrooms. So does the tentativeness of the introduction to a recent International Reading Association publication on prose comprehension (Santa and Hayes, 1981). Others, such as Tuinman (1980) have been critical of the relevance of the study of 'schemas' - restructuring of text in understanding and memory - to the teaching of reading comprehension. However, Otto, et al (1980) would disagree with such a view, claiming an influence from recent work in cognitive psychology on their own technique, which involves glossing expository text so that readers' attention is drawn to the way in which 'mature readers' would use such a text. Nevertheless, these writers too consider that the 'reservoir of facts, implications, and direction for developing instructional procedures designed to enhance learning from text' produced by recent work in psychology and linguistics remains largely untapped (p 186). In fact, the essentiality of the recent research to the glossing method of Otto et al is not made clear in the article and it may be, as Spiro et al (1980) put it in the introduction to a valuable compendious volume, that the practical educators have been ahead of the relevant theoretical and empirical work.

It remains far from clear that the researchers and the educators have met. Nor is it obvious that the often emphasised interdisciplinary nature of studies of text and the reader ensures

relevance for practice, although interdisciplinary studies may be desirable for other reasons.

This paper does not enter far into the current debate about comprehension. This is examined in such publications as Spiro et al (1980) and Sanford and Garrod (1981), both of which discuss work by psychologists and linguists. The emphasis here is rather on assessing the value to the practical teaching of reading of the analyses and descriptions on which much of the psychological work is based.

The analyses which will be examined are substantially those reviewed (in a different context) in a paper given at the previous UKRA conference (Pugh, 1980a). These were: word frequency studies, cohesion, propositional analysis, story grammars and rhetoric. Fuller treatment of all of these is given in Pugh (1981) and of most of them in Tierney and Mosenthal (1980). The discussion of rhetoric is deliberately left until last - although historically it came first - because it is in that area that there has been most discussion of application to language learning.

The discussion of each of the analyses and descriptions is based on what (if anything) the teacher can use them for in the selection of texts and the preparation of teaching material and what uses there may be for children in learning about the particular analysis in question, including how to use it. Although some mention is made of questions of validity those interested in more detailed theoretical questions are referred to e.g. Beaugrande (1981).

## WORD FREQUENCY ANALYSES

Word frequency lists have, of course, been widely used in the preparation of reading materials, both for beginning reading and for foreign language learning. The ladybird scheme, for example, is based on a word frequency list, that of McNally and Murray (1962). From various analyses of the frequency of occurrence of words in large corpuses (e.g. Kučera and Francis, 1967) and from studies of particular age groups, matching of children and texts could be carried out. However, few books come with a list of the frequency of words they contain and counting words manually is a very tedious process. Thus the main use of comparing texts against the vocabulary of their readership has been in research, especially into young children's reading (e.g. Quigley, 1973 or, on structure, Reid, 1972).

Now, while manual counting is tedious, the task is quite simple with a word processor. Since most books in the future will, at some stage in production at least, be put on a word processor the data on the frequency of words in them could easily be made available by publishers.

Studies at the Open University related to the preparation of course materials have taken advantage of the fact that some course units are prepared on a word processor. Whalley (1980) has considered not so much the overall frequency of words, but the incidence of certain words at certain points in a text. In particular he has examined the relationship between the frequency of use of connectives and the introduction of new themes

in a text (and, more broadly in a course).

It may be that the increase in the use of micro-processors in schools can permit some studies to be done on text by children, perhaps in relation to books for younger pupils in the school. Also, it is worth noting that word frequency studies have been used extensively in stylistics, including the establishment of authorship of texts (see Hockey, 1980, for a guide). Such detective work might have a place in the classroom, providing an interesting activity which, as it is in the context of print may be of some help in motivating readers. Nevertheless, the direct relevance to teachers and children of word frequency analyses is relatively slight.

## COHESION

What makes a text coherent, rather than random, lies in both syntactic and semantic features of the text. The study of cohesion has been of particular interest to linguists and Halliday and Hasan (1976) have proposed a very full scheme. Psychologists have been especially concerned with the semantic features which make text coherent and the relationship of the reader's knowledge and frames of reference to those of the writer. Sandford and Garrod (1981) give a useful review of the work in psychology.

The importance of knowledge of cohesion, as opposed to simply reference, has not received so much attention in the United States (and hence in the literature) and the work of Halliday and Hasan does not seem to be well known there; where it is

known it is not well received (e.g. Morgan and Sellner, 1980). However, Chapman in various reports has argued that knowledge of cohesion is important for the development of reading. For example, he says (Chapman, 1979 p. 154) 'pedagogical strategies need to alert readers to the presence of these cohesive elements [in Halliday and Hasan's system] so as to promote the development of fluency and its attendant comprehension'. He recommended cloze procedure as one means of teaching explicit awareness of reference items and cohesive ties.

In earlier work (e.g. Chapman, 1978) he paid particular attention to reference, especially to pronouns and their anaphoric deferents. Although cloze procedure can indeed be used, there is no reason why there cannot be more direct teaching about the existence of these relationships. Indeed, such teaching does, of course, take place both formally and, more informally, in answering children's queries. Also there is (at least) informal teaching about other broader aspects of reference and cohesion, though as Chapman advocates, this could be better established.

One aspect which could be taught is suggested by a paper by Williams (1980) given to the previous UKRA Conference. He examined the devices by which authors introduced new terms to readers. These 'lexical familiarizations' take several forms and, although Williams addressed himself mainly to authors and publishers, it could be valuable for children to learn to recognize explicitly the various devices. Similarly, the use of logical connectives is another area where the reader's knowledge could be explicit. A report on this topic is given by

Elkins and Davies (1978) who argue that relating concepts is an important source of difficulty in school texts.

Studies of cohesion do, therefore, seem to be relevant to selection of materials - in guiding inspection rather than in producing an index of difficulty. Furthermore, they suggest features, of which children could usefully be aware, which are important for the comprehension of texts. How precisely such awareness can best be developed through exercises and teaching warrants much more attention. Some of the activities suggested by Dolan et al (1979), though not ostensibly to do with cohesion, provide relevant ideas.

## PROPOSITIONAL ANALYSIS

Propositional analysis as used by Kintsch et al.(1975) provides a breakdown of a text in terms of its basic propositions. However these relationships are highlighted by ignoring features of verbs such as tense and mood. The method of analysis, which can be extended to provide propositional networks (Kintsch and Vipond, 1979), was intended as a research tool, whereby an analysis of a text could be compared in systematic fashion with the analysis of a summary done from recall. Although propositional analysis has been taught to students of psychology at the Open University, for example, its use remains mainly for research purposes. It can be used for checking children's summaries but it does not seem to lend itself to application in the selection of materials or the devising of exercises nor would it be obviously of value in providing children with insight into

structures in text. The exception here is that the propositional networks might show inter-relationships in text of a kind which children would not readily see in ordinary reading; however, owing to the difficulty of the analysis on which the networks are based they should probably, if used at all, be prepared by the teacher.

## STORY GRAMMARS

One of the difficulties in carrying out propositional analysis is the amount of judgment required on the part of the analyst. The same is true of story grammars, although their proponents would tend to lay claim to objectivity. The basic idea is to do for stories what Chomsky and others have proposed for sentences - that is to provide a means of recognizing all and only the permissible structures in the language and thus to provide ways of describing the constituents of sentences (or stories) and the relationships between the constituents.

Black and Wilensky (1979) have found problems with most grammars they examined as regards their power to reject non-stories. The problems of analysis have led to research centering on a very small number of very simple stories: it is very difficult to make most grammars fit most stories without arbitrariness in decisions, since each proposition may normally only be permitted to have only one function.

Nevertheless, there may be some value for older children in knowing about these attempts to analyse stories and, perhaps, in

trying to apply one. They offer a means of relatively objective analysis, relative that is to the subjectivity of much literary appreciation. Story grammars may also be suggestive, though not directly applicable, for teachers in devising tasks of the 'complete the story' type which were advocated by Dolan et al (1979) who were mentioned in the section on cohesion. Finally, Pearson and Camperell (1980) have said (p. 7) that 'the research on children's comprehension of story structure suggests to us that from the outset .....children ought to be reading stories which are highly predictable in terms of their conformity to canonical story schemata'. The conclusion is arguable, though less so if restricted to beginning readers on the grounds of avoiding the confusion caused by unusual story forms when much else is also new; nevertheless, the implication that authors and teachers of young children should know more about story structures is clear.

RHETORIC

At several points so far the importance or value of explicit knowledge about text construction for teachers and children has been asserted. In the British educational tradition we have tended to relegate or deny the importance of knowing about language. The issue cannot be examined here (but see Pugh, 1980b for a discussion). However, we may note that rhetoric provides for authors and speakers, readers and listeners, an explicit knowledge of conventions used in discourse. What is more it is taken for granted that writers seek to

affect readers and, thus, that the conventions are functional.

Classical rhetoric (see Kennedy, 1980, for a recent study), is important for it is from the ancient writers that many of our notions about the structure of texts and discourse come. However, in a sense the various analyses we have considered so far all come under the umbrella of rhetoric, which differs from them in its scope. What is being argued for, therefore, in suggesting that rhetoric should again be studied in Britain is the importance of explicit knowledge of convention.

In the United States rhetoric has continued as a subject of study, often as a rather routine matter and restricted to composition. Sometimes, however, it is less stereotyped. For example, a recent book on the grammatical foundations of rhetoric (Gray, 1977) offers analyses of relevance both to reading and writing.

In the Netherlands there is now an upsurge of interest in language competence or taalbeheersing (literally, language mastery) in secondary and higher education (Drop and de Vries, 1974). Most of the reports are in Dutch; hence the influence of the work, which covers various aspects of language use, has not yet been extensive. It is clear that rhetoric, which is in essence an eclectic study, is the term which tends to be used for much of work (see e.g. Braet, 1980) relating to writing and reading. Furthermore, analysis close to classical rhetoric is used for examining texts.

## CONCLUSIONS

Of the various approaches discussed, few have more than limited direct use for the teacher or pupil. This is not to say that studies based on them have no value, but a discussion of that issue is not the subject of this paper.

Although various analyses suggest means of examining books for selection, or of preparing tasks and exercises, or, indeed, of analyses for children to undertake, it is a shift in emphasis which is required. The study of rhetoric can involve study of form in relation to function, hence making explicit facts about texts and about readers which can help in reading, writing and other uses of language. In the past rhetoric has involved this, although it must be admitted that it has also at times been an arid study. It need not be so and the developments in Dutch should be viewed with interest, for the framework they may provide for putting various approaches to analysis of text in the service of developing writing and reading through explicit knowledge of convention.

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